



Educating, Engaging and Mobilizing Parents
to Act on Children's Issues

**Testimony of Paul Wessel, Director, Connecticut Parent Power on
RB 1160 -AAC School Transportation, the Development of a Model Teacher Performance
Evaluation System, and Teacher Tenure Laws and Cooperative Arrangements.**

3/17/11 – Education Committee, CT General Assembly Public Hearing

I am here in on behalf of CT Parent Power in support of the sections of RB 1160 concerning teacher evaluation and tenure. I am Paul Wessel, Executive Director of CT Parent Power, a 10 year-old statewide parent organization of 2600 members.

Many parents are frustrated – frustrated with all the talk about the achievement gap – and with the lack of change at the classroom level. Parents want change – often they don't know exactly what that is – they just know they want to see change in their schools.

Parent Power supports the provisions of this bill regarding teacher evaluations and tenure because it is a step toward that change.

It is a step because it gives the managers of public schools another tool to do their job – a more “expeditious” tool in the earlier words of the Stamford schools superintendant.

As parents, we are troubled by how frequently school administrators will agree with us that a particular teacher is not doing their job – but will explain that their hands are tied because of “tenure.” We think this is a cop-out – but to the extent their hands are tied by the current statute, this bill takes away that impediment – and that excuse.

In general, our experience is that most teachers are good at and committed to their jobs. Like most workplaces, however, there are some employees who have been permitted to stay beyond their time. There are administrators – often with six-figure salaries – whose job it is to make sure this doesn't happen. This bill pushes them to manage and evaluate all teachers better – and provides a process for removing properly-managed teachers who can't cut it in the classroom.

Stepping back, we are troubled by the growing *demonization* of teachers – the people in the educational-industrial complex who actually spend time with our kids – and the lack of attention paid to school leaders – from the assistant principal on up to the commissioner of education – whose jobs are to ensure a quality educational experience for all our children. We commend this bill for putting in place a participatory process to take away the obstacles – and excuses – we often hear from administrators.

Finally, as concerned as we are about the refrain from administrators that there is nothing they can do about “bad” teachers, we urge you also to focus on the far more profound issue that 50% of urban teachers leave the profession within the first five years. We desperately need to find good ways to attract and retain the best and the brightest in our classrooms – something countries with high-performing school systems have already figured out.*

Thank you for your time.

* See the McKinsey report on this issue at:

http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/Social_Sector/our_practices/Education/Knowledge_Highlights/Closing_the_talent_gap.aspx